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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by the Dominican Leadership Conference and the Partnership for Global Justice, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

1. On 18 October 2010 the United Nations commemorated the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty using the theme "From poverty to decent work: bridging the gap". Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message called for special attention to be paid to the employment status of young people, saying that a decent job was key to eradicating poverty. Securing decent jobs requires some level of training and education.

Quality instruction

2. The purpose of this statement is to point out the essential relationship between quality training/education/learning and the quality of instruction given by well-trained teachers. The evidence of their direct interdependence is well documented in extensive educational literature. In countries keen to implement the Millennium Development Goals, unfortunately, many are hiring unqualified teachers who are paid less and offered fewer (if any) benefits than regular teachers. The United Nations estimates that double the current number of qualified teachers would be needed in sub-Saharan Africa in order to meet the primary education target by 2015.

Challenges

3. One of the reasons for the practice of settling for unqualified candidates is often pressure by the World Bank and/or International Monetary Fund to cut education budgets in these countries. Additionally, finance ministries and even some aid donors encourage more contract employment of teachers at lower levels of pay and benefits than teachers under standard civil service regulations in order to reduce national budget pressures.

4. In addition to unqualified teachers there are also in many cases an insufficient number of teachers, resulting in unacceptable student-teacher ratios. This is particularly true at the pre-primary and primary levels. For example, in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), India, Liberia, Nepal, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania the pre-primary pupil/teacher ratio was 40:1 or higher in 2007. In certain countries whose overall statistics already appear dismal, marginalized regions face particular disadvantages. In Kenya, the national ratio of pupils to pre-primary teachers is 54:1. However in the district of Turkana, one of Kenya's poorest, the ratio is 123:1. In Indonesia the percentage of pre-primary teachers holding at least one diploma ranges from 60 per cent in Banten, a relatively prosperous area, to only 1 per cent in Maluku, a region with high levels of poverty.

Need for teacher training

5. At the primary level many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have more than doubled the teacher workforce, thereby improving the pupil/teacher ratio. But in order to accelerate progress towards universal primary education most countries also will need to accelerate a concerted drive to recruit and train teachers. Despite the progress reported from 2000 to 2010, trained teacher shortages remain a serious concern. In a number of countries the percentage of trained teachers in the

workforce has actually declined since 1999. In Togo it has fallen from 31 per cent to 15 per cent as recruitment has shifted to contract teachers.[1]

6. For all of the above reasons, reports that more children are enrolled in primary education can be deceiving. Overcrowded classrooms rarely if ever result in the kind of quality education envisioned by Millennium Development Goal 2. And underqualified teachers will ensure that a country fails the quality test.

7. Decent jobs in the twenty-first century will increasingly require some degree of proficiency in mathematics, science and technology. This has implications for the content of educational programmes. Quality teacher training in specialized subjects must be the focus of education planning in every country striving to meet the Millennium Development Goals over the next five years. Owing to the rise of knowledge-based economies, persistent youth unemployment for lack of appropriate knowledge and skills and the general marginalization of young people lacking skills, Governments must review and revalue technical and vocational education.

8. In general, factors that will contribute to assuring quality teachers, and therefore quality learning, are programmes that provide ongoing professional teacher education, grounding in local cultural reality and mentoring by master experienced teachers.

9. Both initial training and professional development are essential to creating an adequate cadre of effective teachers. Teachers need to understand the content of the curriculum in depth; to learn methods that will enable them to teach students of varying abilities; to work within education systems where role models — even a small number — are in evidence; and to be creative in delivering educational content and skills that are appropriate to the cultural reality of their students. Unless the quality of education is adequate, inevitable high dropout and repetition rates work against realizing the goal of universal primary education.

Examples of effective practices

10. There are many examples of initiatives that recognize the relationship between quality learning and quality teaching. For example, the Republic of Korea's UNESCO-supported Learning to Live Together project focuses on teacher training in the Asia-Pacific area for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The objective is to nurture pedagogical practices and learning materials that foster tolerance, social cohesion and intercultural understanding, facilitating peace, non-discrimination and dialogue among peoples. Fittingly, it recognizes that to accomplish any educational Millennium Development Goal, effective teacher training is unavoidable.

11. In Peru, a non-governmental organization has been working closely with teachers to offset a 40 per cent withdrawal rate among the children in primary school and a 60 per cent rate in high school. With the help of the teachers, it was possible to set up four libraries around the barrios, purchase school books, hire tutors, provide classes for parents and start a reading programme for children and

[1] *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010: Reaching the Marginalized* (Paris, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 115.

adults. The local libraries have become resource centres for the children, and the school dropout rate has been reduced to 5 per cent in the primary school and 8 per cent in high school.[2] Other examples abound of the universally recognized relationship between quality learning and quality teaching.

Recommendations

12. Ensuring that all children have access to quality education is essential to guaranteeing full employment and decent work, as well as to breaking the cycle of poverty. But quality education depends on quality teaching. Quality teaching is impossible without an adequate supply of trained professional educators available in every classroom of every country.

13. The submitting organizations encourage Governments to recommit themselves to the principles of quality education spelled out in commitment 6 (b) of the Copenhagen Declaration adopted at the World Summit for Social Development in 1995:

> "Emphasize lifelong learning by seeking to improve the quality of education to ensure that people of all ages are provided with useful knowledge, reasoning ability, skills, and the ethical and social values required to develop their full capacities in health and dignity and to participate fully in the social, economic and political process of development ..."

14. The submitting organizations offer the following recommendations:

- Review existing educational training programmes for teachers to guarantee they are rooted in local cultural reality
- Develop an annual report on the number of qualified teachers currently employed in primary and pre-primary levels, as well as the number in training for classroom employment within the subsequent two years
- Identify and make use of master/experienced teachers to assist in teacher training programmes

15. In keeping with the spirit of the Millennium Development Goals, it is the belief of the submitting organizations that quality education at all levels is a strong driving force for the eradication of poverty and that professionally trained teachers are critical to this initiative.

[2] "Social Integration in Action: Stories from the Grassroots", NGO Committee for Social Development, 2009, p. 16. Available from www.un-ngls.org.

Note: Statement endorsed and supported by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council: Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Congregations of St. Joseph, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, School Sisters of Notre Dame.